

PATENT

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DOCUMENT STORAGE SYSTEM INCLUDING A USER INTERFACE FOR ASSOCIATING DOCUMENTS INTO GROUPS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An electronic document handling system places electronic documents on virtual "stacks" and a virtual "stapling" capability is provided to associate the electronic documents in a virtual stack with each other. A human or computer user selects one document or a plurality of documents and places the selected document(s), or references thereto, onto a stack, and a stack cover sheet is generated. The stack cover sheet contains a table of contents, a title, one or more keywords and/or annotations, as well as controls applicable to the stack. The controls include controls for adding or deleting pages or documents from the stack, controls for changing cover sheet contents and controls for "stapling" the stack. An electronic file containing the cover sheet data electronically represents a stapled stack. Documents that are in permanent form might be left in place, with the cover sheet including just references to the documents instead of the documents themselves. The stack can be secured by a key (or password) supplied by the user or a private key of a permanent storage device which operates the electronic stapler. Optionally, the documents in the stack are encrypted using the same key or a related key. A cryptographic checksum is computed for the stack of documents and the user's, or the system's, digital signature is affixed to the stack's cover sheet. Once a stack is stapled, the stack or a file representing the stack is stored in a stack database or file structure.